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THE HISTORY AND SOCIAL-SCIENCE CURRICULUM OF THE JOLIET TOWNSHIP HIGH SCHOOL

RALPH H. BUSH
Joliet Township High School, Joliet, Illinois

In discussing the history and social-science curriculum of the Joliet Township High School, an attempt will be made to give briefly the reasons that led to changing the courses, the aims that were established, and the curriculum as it is at present. Wherever history department is mentioned, history, social and political science, and economics are meant.

Prior to 1914, the history curriculum consisted of one year of ancient history given generally in the Freshman year, followed by medieval and modern history, and that followed in turn by English history, closing with American history in the Senior year. One-semester courses were offered to Juniors and Seniors in industrial history, economics, civics, and commercial law. One year of history was required for graduation. The history department urged all students to take the required work during their Freshman year. The theory was that a student would become so interested in the study that he would elect the other courses. In practice, 90 per cent of our students took their one year of history, Greek and Roman, as given in the Freshman year.

There had been a feeling of unrest among the members of the history faculty for several years. Finally, in 1913, they decided to try to remedy some of the more glaring evils. It needed but a few meetings to convince the history people that they faced a question, not of a minor change or two, but of entire reorganization. It was decided that the first thing in the reorganization work was to draft the aims of the department. The first aim, it was agreed, was "to teach a liking for the subjects." It was found that the students had taken a course called "history" in the grades, which consisted of a general collection of dates, and that they came into the high school hating the very word "history." The majority

of them took ancient history in the first year in the high school and, seeing no connection between this and their everyday life, declined to elect the later courses. The second aim was "to give a skeleton knowledge of the subject." As the majority of students in the high school do not go to college, the aim of the high-school class should be to give a general survey rather than to turn out a student highly specialized in one small portion of the whole. The third aim, and this was considered the most important, was "to impart the knowledge of where to find information on any subject."

After the three aims had been determined, the question of content of courses was attacked. Imagining a child just entering the high school, the department undertook to make out a four-year course that would give the student everything he should have. It was agreed that the student needed four years of English, needed four years of mathematics, needed four years of science, should have four years of history, should take two to four years of foreign language, should have two to four years of commercial subjects, should have the same amount of time for either manual training or home economics; besides courses in music, art, physical training, band, and orchestra. Thus, it was found that the pupil under consideration could get an excellent high-school education in nine and one-half years. The imaginary child did more than any other one thing to bring the history faculty to realize that they would have to reduce the history curriculum. When that idea had been firmly established, the work of dropping certain subjects from the curriculum and reorganizing others was begun. It was thought that industrial history, commercial law, and English history had no place in the high school. They are excellent subjects, but the valuable material they contain can be given in other courses. Investigation showed that 150 students were taking civics in their Junior or Senior year. As the Sophomore class numbers annually about 500, this meant that approximately 350 students a year were leaving the institution without a course in civics. That led the history group to urge that civics should be required of all students in the Sophomore year. A plan for administering the course was readily worked out. Physical training was required of all students in the high school two days a week. The

Freshmen had four required subjects that recited daily, with physical training on Monday and Wednesday. The Sophomores likewise had four required subjects, with physical training on Tuesday and Thursday. On the days when the students did not have their gymnasium work, they reported to study halls. It was suggested that the one-semester civics course of the Senior year be given to the Sophomores instead, on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday for the entire year. In this way no other department need be disturbed. Immediately there arose the problem of arranging a teacher's program so that he should teach civics classes three days a week and have no classes two days a week. Since the Freshmen took their gymnasium work on Monday and Wednesday, they could take a social science course on Tuesday and Thursday and go to the study hall on Friday. From an administrative point of view the problem was simple. The teacher would teach civics to Sophomores Monday, Wednesday, and Friday, and other social science work to Freshmen on Tuesday and Thursday.

After having arranged the work for the first two years, the history department felt that it could justly demand that history be required as one of the four academic subjects in the Junior and Senior years. At this point a very interesting experiment was conducted. It was thought that it might prove of benefit in shaping the courses if an examination could be given to students who had had three or four years of history and had been out of school for a number of years. Finally, twenty people, very good friends of the school, were asked to help. Upon reaching the institution, they were told that the school wanted to conduct an experiment and wanted their co-operation. They were given pencil and paper and informed that under no conditions were they to write their names or put any mark of identification upon the papers. Then some very simple questions were asked, such as write all that you can remember on Assyria, Chaldea, Persia, Greece, Egypt, Rome, etc. After finishing that examination they were asked if they would be able to come back the following week and take another test, with the promise on their part that they would not look up any historical topics or talk with anyone about any historical matter until after the next examination. It was carefully explained to them that the

value of this experiment lay in their answering the questions without any special preparation. At the next meeting they were asked definite questions about the nations of antiquity.

For several years we had been giving a course in general history to Sophomore commercial students. We then took the commercial students, now Seniors, who had taken their general history two years before and gave them the same questions that we had given to the townspeople. The showing made by the commercial students compared so favorably with the showing made by the townspeople that it convinced the waverers in the history faculty of the value of the course in general history. It was therefore decided that a one-year course of general history or (as we preferred to call it) world-survey of history would be required in the Junior year. American history was required in the first semester of the Senior year, and either economics or sociology in the second semester. It was felt that when a student had his Freshman social-science course, his Sophomore civics course, and his one year of world-survey of history, only one semester should be given to the political phases of American history, especially as the student was required to take either economics or sociology.

The Freshman social-science course which is given each Tuesday and Thursday is a course in vocational guidance, which we call "occupations." As the gymnasium classes are segregated, we continue the same policy in the Freshman occupations classes and the Sophomore civics classes. The book for the boys is Gowan and Wheatley's *Occupations*;¹ for the girls, Hoerle and Saltzberg's *The Girl and Her Job*.² It is generally observed that the students entering the high school have very little conception of the various vocations or professions. An actual case will illustrate that point. A boy was brought into the principal's office by one of the teachers with the suggestion that his course be changed. The boy's name was Aramonda Gilda Balda. He was taking an engineering course which requires four years of mathematics. The records showed that the boy in the grades had failed continually in arithmetic and that he had not been able to grasp mathematics in the high school. He had been urged to change to a manual-training course, but had

¹ Boston: Ginn & Co., 1916.

² New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1919.

steadfastly refused on the ground that his father would not let him. Finally, Aramonda was asked to bring his father to school. When the father came, he insisted that the boy stay in the engineering course, and it finally developed that the father wanted his son to be a fireman on a railroad engine.

During the year business men and women are brought to talk to the occupations classes. For example, the superintendent of one of the hospitals gave the girls a talk on nursing. One of the bankers talked to the boys about his profession.

In the second semester a student must choose a profession that he thinks he would like to follow. The school furnishes plain, heavy manila paper covers and white paper; the student writes a book in which he tells of his chosen profession. He makes a title-page; he dedicates the book to whomever he pleases; he writes a preface; then he describes the profession. There are chapters on the qualifications necessary to that profession, the amount of education that he needs, the amount of money to be expended on preparation for the profession, the financial compensation that he may look forward to in future years, the prospects of advancement, the social advantages of the profession, and his own personal disqualifications. In the end he gives a bibliography showing where he got his information. He is also urged to illustrate this book as much as he possibly can, either with handwork or with pictures taken from magazines and newspapers. Throughout the course the student is urged to consider his choice of a profession a tentative one. He is repeatedly told that he will probably change his plans by the time he is a Senior. The students take a very keen interest in the course.

In the Sophomore year the civics course is a combination of community civics and governmental civics. There are a number of excellent textbooks, but the one that is being used is *American Government*¹ by Magruder.

The course in world-survey of history given in the Junior year is looked upon as one of the best courses in the department. The first six weeks are devoted to the field of ancient history, Wolfson's *Ancient Civilization*² being the text used. The rest of the year is

¹ Boston: Allyn & Bacon, 1917.

² New York: American Book Co., 1916.

devoted to medieval and modern history with Harding's *New Medieval and Modern History*¹ as text.

The textbook used in the one-semester course in American history is Muzzy's *American History*.² There is no one-semester American history on the market, but we have found Muzzy to be very satisfactory. In the last semester of the Senior year the student chooses either economics or sociology. The text used in economics is Thompson's *Elementary Economics*.³ Marshall and Lyon's *Our Economic Organization*⁴ and Burch's *American Economic Life*⁵ are used for reference work almost as much as the text. In sociology the text is *American Social Problems*⁶ by Burch and Patterson.

It may not be out of order to describe a contemplated change or two in the curriculum. It is felt that, instead of permitting a student to choose either economics or sociology, there should be a course giving parts of both. This past semester such a course was roughly outlined; it had an introductory chapter of governmental civics, followed by about ten chapters taken from the three economics textbooks named, and about ten chapters from Burch and Patterson's *American Social Problems*. It is too early to express an opinion on the value of this course. One other change contemplated is that of offering a course either once or twice a week to be called advanced occupations. This would be taken in addition to the four subjects required in the Junior year and would be somewhat similar to the course of the Freshman year. Many students in the last semester of their Senior year begin to wish that they had changed their course and had taken something else or, as it is so often expressed, begin to find themselves. The history department is hoping that this advanced occupations course in the Junior year will enable these students to decide upon desirable changes before it is too late.

¹ New York: American Book Co., 1918.

² Boston: Ginn & Co., 1920 (revised).

³ Chicago: Benj. H. Sanborn Co., 1920.

⁴ New York: Macmillan Co., 1921.

⁵ New York: Macmillan Co., 1921.

⁶ New York: Macmillan Co., 1918.